



PUNTLAND: THE SOBERING TRIALS OF THE FIRST YEAR

By Abdelkarim A Hassan
April 15, 2015

There was much jubilation among many Somalis and in particular those from Puntland celebrating long and wide when Dr. Abdiwali M. Ali was elected as the president of [Puntland on January 8, 2014](#). The euphoria shown by many from the region when the election results were announced had more to do with the rejection of Abdirahman Faroole than the election of Abdiwali as an agent of change. The people of Puntland were despondent with Faroole's administration and culture of nepotism, corruption, and incompetency. There was a yearning for any change that would lead to Faroole's exit. Faroole's departure was welcomed with much optimism and perceived by many as a new dawn on the horizon for Puntland.

It was reminiscent of the same jubilation that was accorded to President Hassan Sh. Mohamoud when he came to power on Oct. 2012; however, the current dismal conditions prevalent under his leadership are testament to his failure not only to Somalis worldwide but also among the International Community. President Mohamoud's immense



shortcomings are due to the prevailing plunder and missed opportunities to lead Somalia to a secure, stable, and prosperous statehood.

Abdiwali M. Ali, the fifth President (including an interim president) of Puntland and the former Prime Minister of Somalia in the transitional administration from June 2011 to October 2012, won the Puntland presidency with a slim margin, at a time when the region was dominated by rampant corruption as well as maladministration.

President Abdiwali, while campaigning for the office, put together a vision: “My mission is based on a genuine desire to create a better future for all Somalis—a future that is characterized by the virtuous cycle of



peace, stability, and wealth of opportunities, in place of the vicious cycle of insecurity, poverty and underdevelopment”. Moreover, as soon as he was sworn into office, Abdiwali promised that under his watch, Puntland is destined for economic prosperity and political stability. The President was right to focus on economic development and political stability, among other urgent needs of a regional state that has never seen the many promises made by its leaders. He presented these two paramount components of Puntlands’ vision for success in his victory speech.

The key challenges facing Puntland, that needed concrete approach in his first 100 days, as the President outlined, included: jobs creation, strengthening public and private institutions, finding long term solutions to the intricate issue of Sool Sanaag and Cayn (SSC) region and paving the way for a multiparty system. Thus, Abdiwali’s success should be measured on the achievements and progress or the lack thereof he made on these key segments.

Security and Integrity of Puntland

At the onset of his presidential victory, Abdiwali committed to convene a grand assembly between Puntland administration and Sool, Sanaag and Cayn communities, to find a lasting solution on the issue of SSC. Many people have welcomed the approach to tackle

head on the issue of SSC, with no preconditions. This is, as is well known, challenging and yet critical to the integrity and existence of Puntland. Laas Caanood has fallen to Somaliland's hands on Oct, 2007, while Adde Musse was in power. Laas Caanood, a key city as well as other parts of SSC region, has since been under the control of Somaliland. The SSC communities attribute the loss of Laas Caanood to Puntland leader's lukewarm interest in the SSC region. This issue has been the center of the SSC conflict with the Puntland administration. Notwithstanding that SSC communities should put their house in good order and form a forward looking unified voice.

President Abdiwali has yet to honor his promise to convene a meeting with SSC communities. As his predecessor, the issue of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn is not a priority for him, which has led the communities from such regions to further disengage from his administration, as one of the key stakeholders of Puntland. Obviously, it seems Abdiwali's vision for Puntland is a continuation of Faroole's policies. From the looks of it, Abdiwali's interest and governing doesn't go beyond Garowe and the surrounding vicinity.

On the other hand, Puntland security is deteriorating. Insecurity and targeted killings are becoming the norm. There are reports alleging that Puntland's administration under Abdiwali, have failed to pay the salaries of those responsible for safeguarding the security of the public. Some reports state that the proud men and women in uniforms, those entrusted with preserving the public safety of Puntland, have not received salaries for more than 10 months.



Galgala is another contentious issue facing Puntland. On that front, President Abdiwali has recently intensified the war in the Galgala highlands, to combat the rise and support of the Al-Shabab militia. This war is however missing a strategy to build a lasting peace, and prevent the swaying of the youth to fall into the hands of Al-Shabab. President Abdiwali has thus far failed to capitalize on the defection of Sheik Mohamed Said (Atom), the Al-Shabab, Galgala highland leader, after his surrender to the federal government in Mogadishu on June 7, 2014 and his denunciation of Al-Shabab.

Sheikh Atom has been delisted from the US and UN terror list after he repudiated his violent past and association with Al-Shabab. Thus, Sheikh Atom should have been actively utilized as part and parcel to win the hearts and minds of those youth who remain with Al-Shabab. This rigidity shows Dr. Abdiwali's war with the extremist anti-peace elements is one dimensional, focusing more on a military solution while ignoring all other aspects of this horrendous war with Al-Shabab. A great lasting solution can't be trusted to a one way military standoff. Herb Cohen, the author of *you can negotiate anything*, states that "your world is a giant negotiating table". It is necessary to employ negotiation strategies and the prudence of pardoning militia members to unarm and denounce Al-Shabab and its treacherous terror activities, is vital. There is puzzlement that appears from the inaction of the president on this front, thus questioning the true intention of this war. Some have settled to calling it a propaganda war, perhaps to receive attention and aid from the International Community.



These growing insecurities in Puntland have also led to the death and injuries of innocent lives, case in point, the assassination of journalist Abdirisak Ali Abdi, of Radio Daljir on Nov. 2014, at a restaurant in northern Galkayo.

President Abdiwali's administration also frequently imprisons, detains, and harasses journalists without due process. On August 6, 2014, police detained Fatima Yusuf, a reporter of Radio Daljir, Puntland TV reporter Khadro Mohamed and Kalsan TV reporter Abdinasir Da'ad. This shows a lack and complete disregard for freedom of speech and the rights of journalists.

On Dec 11, 2014, *Reporters Without Borders* put out a statement after four online news websites had been blocked. "The attitude of the Puntland authorities is not only worrying but also very disappointing, said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters without Borders Africa desk". The report further stated "Accompanied by soldiers, police chief Ahmed Abdullahi Samatar stormed into Radio Garowe, a station based in Puntland's

capital, Garowe, on 7 December and cut short the news programme presented by Ali Abdi Du'alle, threatening him with arrest, after he broadcast a report about a protest against a government tax”.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said “to be neutral between right and wrong is to serve wrong”. It’s appalling to witness such practice from a western educated president. These tactics are usually reserved for tyrant dictators who have been not schooled on the freedom of speech and the importance of an independent free press.

President Abdiwali recently initiated what he called a performance review of his administration. The practice involves gathering all of his cabinet members while the president in his mighty high self, acts as the prosecutor, the judge, and the jury. It’s peculiar to say the least that the President removes himself from the process as the ultimate responsible entity for the performance of his cabinet, maybe to borrow from President Truman “The Buck Stops Here” scenario is missing here. He perhaps overlooked that his cabinet’s performance is a reflection on him. This sham review is often employed as a propaganda machine.



President Abdiwali and the notorious president of the Somali regional State of Ethiopia, Mr. Abdi Mohamoud (Ilay), who also orchestrates this silly review, often humiliating his young and inexperienced cabinet, are in equal footing on this bogus review. Moreover, rather than empowering his cabinet, there are numerous reports indicating that Abdiwali has created special offices under his presidential office, for the sole purpose of concentrating power, thus undermining and interfering with the work of his ministers.

Instead of emboldening his cabinet, Abdiwali is the center of everything. What we have seen from him thus far, is his frequent travel and photo opportunities with low-level delegates.

Relations with Mogadishu

On the question of Somalia, President Abdiwali, although instrumental in drafting the Somali constitution whilst the PM of the Transitional Government under President Sherif Ahmed, he currently acts more like a reactionary to the process than working with Mogadishu as a key stakeholder on this front.

We often hear or read press releases from his office, either condemning or criticizing Hassan Sh. Mohamoud's government, rather than engaging and constructively taking an active and important role on the review process on Somalia's transition into democracy, as stipulated by the 2016 vision.

While all eyes were focused on Hassan Sh. Mohamoud's dismal failure to lead Somalia's Federal Government, Abdiwali was cruising, with no tangible accomplishments. More than one year into office, other than micromanaging his cabinet, while making himself busy with meaningless visits, forcing children, women and elderly out of their schools and homes to welcome him.

Instead of putting forth a comprehensive plan to put children back to school, job creation initiatives, and other economic development programs, his frequent and ill-advised local visits are becoming an economic burden to Puntland. Imagine the many hours spent on just welcoming the president on his frequent visits and travels. What a travesty!

The office of the presidency be it a country, a region, or an organization demands a leader with a vision and can-do attitude. Counter to popular belief in that region, the title of the President comes with tough decisions, consultation with advisers, public input, and stakeholder engagement. The performance of the president has disappointedly been characterized with indecisiveness, micromanaging and weak institutions that haven't been empowered. The president seems to take the fight or flight phenomenon whenever he encounters challenges. This explains though not alone in the region, his frequent travel to Addis Ababa, every time he confronts a challenging situation. It may be a great surprise to the President to point out that 2016 cannot be a goal for him when he is unable to manage his own turf, Puntland.

I recall when Abdiwali won the Puntland presidency, the festivity gatherings held inside and outside of the county to support his election. I must confess, [this writer attended](#) one of those gatherings, and saw optimism in the faces of people, that Abdiwali, a former PM of the Transitional Federal Government, would take this opportunity to move Puntland forward and bring back the prestige of the Presidential office of Puntland.

It's important to note that President Abdiwali's administration has achieved some infrastructure projects such as new roads, airport, and seaport development initiatives in Bossaso; however, the task ahead and the developmental needs both in terms of human capital and institutions building, both public and private, are enormous. I hope eyeing the 2016 countrywide Presidential elections is not clouding Abdiwali's responsibility as president of Puntland. It's high time to focus efforts to lead Puntland into the prosperous region it can become.

The President needs a capable and empowered council to advise him to pursue the remaining term wisely. I wonder if all those jubilations accorded to President Abdiwali at the time of his selection were worth it or were they another gathering, one among many, of the kind we see

everywhere these days, the futile drum rolling for Somali leaders who are failing the people and the pride of the country and who have not proven worth of all the flag bearing, singing, and dancing. Where is the accountability? When will we stop wrapping ourselves with flags whose dignity has been relegated to clapping?



In conclusion, it's the hope of this writer that Dr. Abdiweli will put to use the many years of schooling and hard work and finally use from the playbook of leading the people of Puntland as an honest leader and one whose legacy will be written in the pages of the greatest leaders that Africa has seen. It's still possible to seize the moment and lead, Mr. President.

Recommendation:

- 1) Initiate a vision and strategies to engage with communities from SSC to find a lasting solution to the issues of SSC region. This urgent matter should be accorded utmost priority and should be implemented within a short period.

- 2) Create vocational training, civic engagement, and rural and economic development programs to develop the human capital of youth.
- 3) Create strong public and private institutions, empower the cabinet ministers, and disband and or limit the presidential special offices tasked to interfere and undermine the cabinet.
- 4) The government should cease the overzealous culture of orchestrated lining up of women, children and elderly to welcome government officials and dignitaries. It's so unnecessary and a waste of resources.
- 5) Empowering of women in the cabinet and strengthening their role with elders, parliamentarians and other ministries.

Abdelkarim A Hassan

WardheerNews

Email: Abdelh1@hotmail.com